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Patriarch John of Antioch: The peace of people, however, if not associated with the peace of God, is pure falsehood



Pastoral Letter of the Holy Nativity of Christ – 2018

By the Grace of God

John X

Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Antioch

To my Brothers, the Hierarchs and Shepherds of the Holy Church of Antioch,
My Beloved Spiritual Children throughout the Apostolic See

“I hear the angels sing today in Bethlehem: “Glory to Him whose good pleasure it was that peace should come on earth!” (Litya of the Holy Nativity of Christ’s Feast).

Through the words of the Melodist, the Church proclaims the glorious Nativity of the Lord and the singing of the angels, as occurring “today.” The Nativity event did not just happen two thousand years ago. Today, no matter where I reside, I am still able to connect to Bethlehem and its Nativity Cave, using my heart and mind.

Today, I can perceive and behold the Holy Nativity, and not just read about it in the Gospel. Today, I can hear the angels chanting, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will among men."

God is pleased that there be peace on earth. The peace of people, however, if not associated with the peace of God, is pure falsehood. Christmas is firstly the Lord's Day of Peace, which is what this world longs for, amid the current waves of violence and unrest.

The Holy Nativity of Christ is the feast of the Child Jesus Christ. Christ has not found on our earth any place holier than the womb of the Virgin, and more spacious than the dark cave. He has come to make His light shine, dispelling darkness and turning the heavens into a glorious dance.

God did not come to save exclusively a particular people. Jesus Christ, Who led by His Light the Magi from the ends of the earth, calls all humanity to the harbor of peace, using the voice of conscience and heart.

Each year, humanity yearns for His peace, so winter is comforted by the warmth of the cave and by the Christmas decoration. Despite all circumstances, the human heart is instinctively disposed to search for tranquility and peace. The peace on earth is God's will and pleasure. God's glory in the highest is reflected in peace on earth. The people here are able to see the glory of God to the degree that they are able to sense the divine peace in their depths and in their relationship with other people on earth. God saw it good to have peace as a window for humans to behold His glory.

Even though we, as Antiochian Christians, are firmly rooted in this great East, we are also far-reaching to the whole world. We are more like the manger of Bethlehem, which embraced Christ, but its fragrance spread to all domains. We are from the heart of this East, and from its humble earthly greatness. We did not get protection from anyone, since our Lord Jesus Christ is the jewel of our crown, and we know "Him Crucified," as St. Paul the Apostle says.

The Bethlehem manger accepted the newborn Babe, Whose light has shone to the end of the world. We, like this manger, received the humble Child, and proclaimed Him to the world, through the mouths of the Apostles, as Lord, Almighty, Sincere, and Loving. The manger of Bethlehem received the newborn Babe, and the Church of Antioch, as a manger of His Gospel, gave His disciples the name of "Christians."

The manger of Bethlehem knew the Lord in meekness, in the darkness of a cave, and in many tribulations, but all this did not stand in the way of the Gospel of

salvation, whose Light has filled the entire world. In addition, the Church of Antioch knew the humble Lord, in many dark stages of history and in much distress, but She endeavored to preserve for two thousand years Her faithfulness to Jesus Christ, and Her persistence in spreading the Good News to the ends of the earth.

The manger in Bethlehem embraced Christ two thousand years ago, and brought Him to the world, and the Church of Antioch, being the cradle of the Christian thought, embraced the Gospel from the mouths of the Apostles, and spread it to all, as a tribute to Her Lord and Savior. No worldly power is able to take away from us our Christian hope and our attachment to our land, where we have lived in fellowship with all its various entities, despite the difficulties we faced in history.

We are deeply connected to this East in loyalty and faithfulness. We are Christ's Gospel implanted in human hearts, long before it was imprinted in books.

Our prayers today are lifted up to our Lord and Savior, that He may establish His peace in the East and throughout the world. Our prayers are for the peace of Syria, the stability of Lebanon, Iraq, and other countries of this East, for Palestine and its capital Jerusalem, which have remained and will remain in our hearts capable of withstanding all hardships.

Our prayers are for the return of all the kidnapped people, including our brothers, the Bishops of Aleppo, Youhanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi, whose cause brings much sorrow to each Christian, Muslim, and citizen of this East, and to every human heart yearning for peace. Our prayers are for all the refugees, the displaced and missing people. Furthermore, we pray the Lord Almighty for those who reposed in the Lord in the hope of the Resurrection and life eternal. Our calls are for the peace and aid of the world.

On this Holy Nativity, our wishes are for each human being to make his or her heart a cave for the King of Glory. We also pray to the newborn Child for you, our beloved children of the Antiochian See in the homeland and abroad, that peace and quietness may abound in your heart, the peace that comes from the Lord of peace, to Whom we give glory and honor forever, Amen.

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